



# The Grief Recovery Method<sup>®</sup>

by The Grief Recovery Institute<sup>®</sup>

## Discussing the Best Grief Definition You Will Find



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# About The Authors

This eBook is co-authored by articles from Russel Friedman, Steve Moeller, and Allison James.



Russell Friedman arrived at the Grief Recovery Institute in 1986 on the heels of a second divorce and a bankruptcy. After dealing with the emotions caused by those and other losses, he began a rigorous training under the guidance of the Institute founder, John W. James, eventually becoming a partner and co-author of *The Grief Recovery Handbook*, *When Children Grieve*, and *Moving On*. Together, Russell and John co-developed the Grief Recovery Method Support Group, which has helped more than 500,000 people all over the country and abroad.

Russell became the go-to Grief Recovery expert on CNN. He appeared on that network many times, most notably in the wake of 9/11. He has made a number of media appearances in the aftermath of national tragedies, most recently on *The Today Show*, in response to the death of Michael Jackson to help guide parents when children suffer loss. He was also a guest lecturer at local academic institutions and has consulted with major companies who are learning that unresolved loss has a negative impact in the work place.

On November 26, 2016, Russell passed away surrounded by his family. Russell will be greatly missed and his legacy will continue on in the work of all the people's lives he touched. [Click here](#) to read our tribute to Russell.

Stephen Moeller has been a licensed Funeral Director since 1978. Steve established one of the first Grief Recovery Method Support Groups over thirty years ago. Since then, thousands of grieverers have gone through his programs. Steve was the Director for Community Relations at Floral Haven Crematory, Funeral Home, and Cemetery in Broken Arrow, OK, prior to resigning to form Grief Recovery Resources, Inc. He also has served on the Tulsa County Task Force on Infant Mortality, the Tulsa Human Response Coalition, and was a member of "Ask the Experts" on Aurora Casket's Funeral Plan. Steve is a featured grief and recovery speaker at hospitals, churches, civic clubs and many other organizations, but spends the bulk of his working time focused on Certification Trainings.

Allison James is the daughter of John James, creator of the Grief Recovery Method and founder of the Grief Recovery Institute. Allison is a Certified Grief Recovery Specialist and contributing author for the Institute.

# The Best Grief Definition You Will Find



Jun 04, 2013

By Russell Friedman

Since grief is such a wide topic that covers so many kinds of losses and an almost infinite range of emotions, there isn't a single grief definition that covers it all. But there are three we use to help people understand what grief is and what it isn't.

The most basic one is:

*“Grief is the normal and natural emotional reaction to loss or change of any kind. Of itself, grief is neither a pathological condition nor a personality disorder.”*

While that definition is accurate, it doesn't really explain what grief is. So here's another one we use to give a better idea of what grief is, beyond the fact that it's normal:

*“Grief is the conflicting feelings caused by the end of or change in a familiar pattern of behavior.”*

When someone important to us dies, it represents an end to what has been familiar for us, and we must adapt to that new—usually unwanted—reality. Our lives are different after someone meaningful to us dies. That’s fairly easy to understand.

It may be a little less obvious to understand what we mean when we say “conflicting emotions.” Let us explain, using circumstances you’ll probably understand if you’ve ever been a primary caretaker to someone who was afflicted with a terminal disease, like cancer. If not, you’ll probably still be able to relate.

For most people who’ve been in that situation, the primary emotion they feel when that person dies is a tremendous sadness. Part of the sadness is about the irrevocable fact of the death, and another aspect is that a miracle didn’t happen to cure the illness and allow more time together.

But in addition to the sadness and other painful feelings involved, a huge percentage of people who’ve attended to a dying relative, spouse, or friend over a long period of time, will tell you that one of the feelings they felt when that person died, was a sense of relief. Relief that the person they loved was no longer in pain; and relief at the difficulty of seeing someone they loved in pain and the frustration of not being able to cure them or ease their pain.

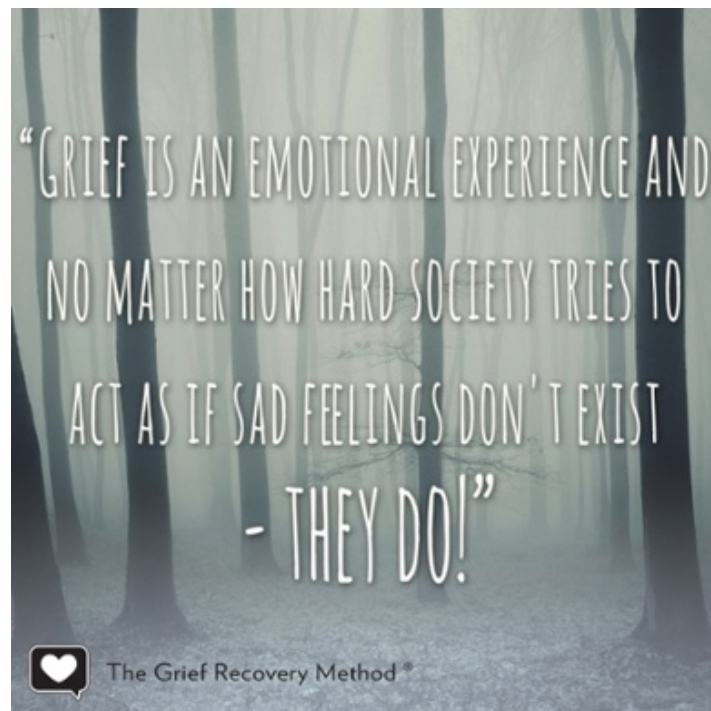
Relief is often perceived as a somewhat positive feeling, especially when it comes at the same time as sadness. So the idea of conflicting feelings, in simplest terms, is sadness on the one hand and relief on the other.

However, the idea of conflicting feelings isn’t limited to death and the entire range of emotions including sadness and relief. We suggest to anyone who’s ever gotten married that their wedding day probably contained a conflicting mixture of feelings. There’s the love and excitement and high hopes on the one hand, and there’s the loss of certain freedoms and independence on the other. Even if it’s a good trade-off, it still represents a loss.



We can even move away from death and marriage and talk about conflicting feelings in other life areas. For example, when you get a promotion and raise in salary at work, that's a good thing. But along with the change may come an end to some or many of the daily interactions with co-workers in your old position.

As you can see, our definition using conflicting feelings relates to most—if not all—of the major life changes that can and do happen. At this point, we can tie the first two definitions together and say that the range of emotions—including those that seem to be conflicting—that we feel in response to the changes in our lives, are normal and natural.



## Grief Definition—Reaching Out For Someone Who's Always Been There

There's another definition of grief that's so descriptive that we include it in all of our books, and usually quote it every public speech we make. It's a piece of language that we didn't create, but if we knew who first said it, we'd give them credit.

*"Grief is the feeling of reaching out for someone who's always been there, only to discover when I need her [or him] one more time, she's no longer there."*

We find that statement to be profoundly emotional and exceptionally clear in its

meaning. We believe that the person who coined it was referring to the death of a long-term spouse. But it could just as easily apply to the death of a parent, who was clearly there from the beginning of your life.

As poignant as that statement is in giving words to feelings, it can be reversed and used for a different painful situation; as when a long-term relationship has never been good, in which case it can be stated as:

*“Grief is the feeling of reaching out for someone who has never been there for me, only to discover when I need them one more time, they still aren’t there for me.”*

In that situation, it doesn’t imply that the other person has died, but is still emotionally or otherwise unavailable to you, as they’ve always been.

Lastly, in the case of divorce, it can be restated as: “Grief is the feeling of reaching out for someone who had been there for me at one time, only to discover that I can’t go to them for help or comfort anymore.”

## One More Grief Definition—A Cliché With Which We Agree

*Most people are familiar with the expression, “Every one grieves in their own way and at their own pace.”*

We agree with the basic truth of that quote, even though it doesn’t define grieve beyond saying that we’re all individuals and we will each experience and express our grief uniquely and in our own time.

## Summing Up

There are many other definitions of grief that you can find if you want to spend time researching. But we caution you that defining basic grief, while important, doesn’t necessarily lead to recovery or completion of what the death or divorce has left behind in terms of unresolved or incomplete grief.



# Defining Grief - Everyone Responds Differently



Jan 10, 2017

By Steve Moeller

It would be wonderful if grief was like math. When you look at a series of numbers that you are adding together, the answer is always the same. Two different people can add the same list of numbers, and the answer will always be the same, assuming they added correctly. Once you learn the basics of addition, finding the answer is not difficult.

Grief is not the same for everyone!

Unfortunately, grief is not like that. Grief is based on emotions. Grief is based on your personal relationship to who or what was lost. Each person and relationship is different, which means that how we deal with each loss will be different as well.

This is particularly evident when you look at family members who experienced the same loss. It is not unusual to hear one family member say of another, "they are just not grieving right"! Since each relationship is different, even in the same family, each person's response to that loss will be different as well.

One family member may throw themselves into their work, even seeking overtime

hours, as a way to take their mind off the loss. Another member of the same family may find it hard to get out of bed in the morning. Does this mean that one is right and the other wrong? No, it just means that they are dealing with their grief differently.

In cases of parents who have lost a child, you might find one family member that brings up the child's name in nearly every sentence, while the other avoids voicing that name. Does this mean that one parent cared more about the child than the other? No. Again, this is just another example of different coping mechanisms.

This is the trouble with defining grief: everyone responds differently. This may be based on the examples presented to them as a child. It may be due to the perceived differences of how they think they need to respond as a man or woman. It is also due the differences in our individual relationships to who or what was lost from our lives.

Just because others respond differently, does not mean that they are not hurting as well.

Unfortunately, many people are not aware that each of us responds differently to each loss, and there is often a perception that others in the family did not care as much as we did. This is one of the reasons that some families seem to fall apart after a loss.

Rather than fighting over how others are coping or arguing over who is hurting the most, a better solution would be to accept that each is hurting and coping in their own private way and that the best thing to do is take action to move forward.

This sounds easy on the face of it, but requires a change of mindset. It involves changing a familiar behavior pattern of assuming that we are right in how we respond to situations and that others who respond differently are wrong. It requires a focus on taking action to be able to enjoy fond memories of the past, rather than worrying about a future that is different than the one we had planning. It takes courage!

Taking the right action can make things better for everyone.

Grief recovery is not something that you can do alone. It requires finding a Grief Recovery Specialist to assist you in either a one-on-one setting or in a group. This will offer you the opportunity to put voice behind your feelings, as part of taking recovery action, without fear of analysis, criticism, or judgment.



“It is never  
too soon to heal  
your heart.”



The Grief Recovery Method ®

While you might think that you can simply buy a [Grief Recovery Handbook](#) and work on it together as a family, we often find that there is a fear of how others might respond to what you feel you need to say. That fear may come from

responses you have had in the past when expressing those feelings. That fear will likely cause you to hold back from honestly saying the important things that must be said as part of taking recovery action.

Working with a [Specialist](#) to guide you through this process, whether one-on-one or in a group, will provide you with a safe environment to move through the emotional pain of this loss. If you elect to join a group, you will still have the opportunity to express your feelings out of earshot of your other family members, so that there will be no worry as to how they might interpret what you honestly need to say.

The key thing to remember is that everyone's grief is different, even with a shared loss, and that rather than letting that pain hinder ongoing relationships, you have the option of taking grief recovery action.

# What is the Difference Between Trauma and Grief?



Feb 18, 2015

By Allison James

Over the past 30 years a variety of words have become popular to describe grief. One word that has recently made headlines is the word “trauma”. Language is important, so we’re going to clarify our take on the word.

Trauma is an event. It can be any event that causes psychological, physical, emotional or mental harm; such as a death or abuse. A traumatic event could also be called a loss event. If someone dies, that’s a loss. If someone was abused, that to is a loss. A loss of trust. Whether you want to call the event trauma or a loss is ok, but the result of a traumatic event is GRIEF.

Grief is the normal and natural response to loss. It’s the conflicting emotions that result in the end of, or change in, a familiar pattern or behavior. Grief is the feeling of wishing things would have ended different, better, or more. Grief is the normal and natural feelings after a trauma.

Although no two people grieve the same, there are some common responses grievers might experience such as an overwhelming sense of numbness, changes in sleeping or eating patterns and wishing things ended differently. Trauma can be an extremely emotional loss event, which ultimately is a grieving experience. If you

see your dog get hit by a car, the event could most definitely be described as traumatic. The solution, however, is the same solution a griever would use

following any loss. The griever has to get complete with the relationship to the pet that died.

Here are a few examples that are a trauma event in themselves and why they result in feelings of grief:

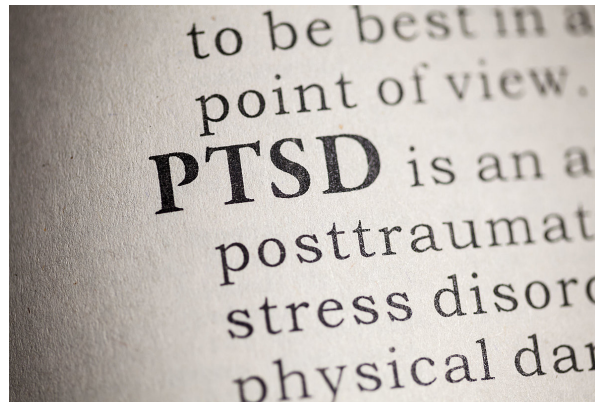
- Sexual Abuse: According to the U.S. Department of Justice's National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)--there is an average of 237,868 victims (age 12 or older) of sexual assault each year. That doesn't include children. It's a horrifying, devastating and painful thing for anyone to experience. Many people associate assault as being traumatic, but don't associate it with grief. But if you stop think about it, isn't it a loss?
- Loss of trust, whether it's trust from the person who harmed them, or loss of trust in future relationships.
- Loss of control of one's body.
- Loss of safety.
- Suicide: is often shocking for the survivors, but that does not mean you cannot recover. You might miss your friend who died, or wish you could have done something different to save him or her. That's grief.

It's harmful to mislabel grief as trauma because it isn't accurate; trauma and grief are not the same.

1. If you misdiagnose, you mistreat.
2. Trauma turns a griever into a victim. Victims can't feel better unless someone else takes an action.
3. **The Grief Recovery Method®** gets to the core of the grief; so the griever can go on to lead a happy and healthy life.

**The Grief Recovery Method®** has helped grievers who have suffered from every type of loss and painful event imaginable from seeing a suicide, sexual abuse and any of the other 40+ types of loss.

# PTSD or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder



Mar 28, 2017

By Steve Moeller

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a relatively new term. It was first introduced in the 1980 American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III). It has since been further modified in its definition in the DSM-IV and DSM-5. What it describes, however, is hardly new. Some have said that this concept of being overwhelmed by a single or series of related events can be tracked back to the first caveman attacked by a sabre toothed tiger.

Since the 1600's, previous terms that described similar diagnoses were primarily focused on those who served in the military. Such terms as shell shocked, combat exhaustion, and post-Vietnam combat reaction are just a few of those terms used in the last century. It now goes beyond military involvement to refer to people who have dealt with enormously impactful events in their lives, including rape, physical or sexual abuse, and terrorist attacks, to name just a very few.

It is a diagnosis. It cannot be made by a clinician until at least four weeks after that event has taken place. There are varying degrees as to how it impacts the life of the person so diagnosed. Many of the symptoms are remarkably similar to unresolved grief.



In the first few years after this term was coined, it was strictly confined to clinical practice. Unfortunately, like many terms, it has taken on a bit of a life of its own. After Survivor-Africa, one of the participants claimed on a late night talk show that she had been so unfairly edited in the televised show that she was suffering from PTSD. It has become so frequently used in all forms of media that it is not uncommon to hear a journalist, with no psychiatric training, suggesting it as a possible diagnosis for someone after a tragic event.

When it comes to working with people who tell us that they are suffering from PTSD or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the first question that needs to be asked is how and when they were diagnosed. The reason for this is simple. It is very possible that they have self-diagnosed based on what they think this term means. Very few people actually go to the [National Center for PTSD](#), a part of the U.S. Veterans Administration, for the complete definition and the test of symptoms. Only a small number of people have actually been diagnosed by a qualified psychiatric clinician.

Those who have self-diagnosed may have simply found a label that seems to explain and justify why they are having problems. The problem with any label is it can offer a reason for their problem, but does nothing to solve it. It can even end up being an impediment to them taking action. As stated earlier, the symptoms of PTSD are remarkably similar to those of grief. It is possible that those who claim to suffer from this disorder without a true diagnosis are indeed grievers overwhelmed by a recent, or not so recent, emotional loss. As grief professionals, we know that there are actions they can take to recover!

Grief is the normal and natural emotional reaction to any change that has impacted a life. Since most people have never had any meaningful training on how to deal with loss, it can be overwhelming. Having someone else tell you to “be strong and get over it” does nothing to effectively deal with that pain. Successful recovery from loss involves sorting out those things that were incomplete in that relationship and putting voice to those things we wish might have been different or better. It also involves dealing with the dreams and expectations of a different future than what is being faced after that loss. This entire process is the foundation for the [Grief Recovery Method](#). It is a plan for action, rather than leaving people with simply a label to explain that they are in emotional pain.

Even for those have been given this “label” by a professional, taking Grief Recovery Method (GRM) action can be a valuable part of the “healing process.”

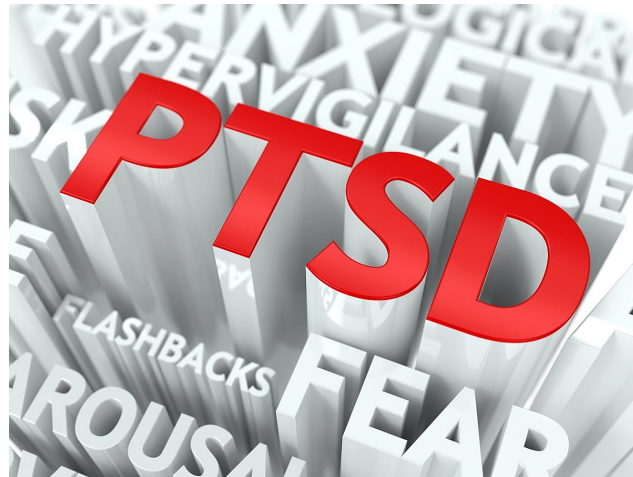
One of the more effective therapies, outlined by the National Center for PTSD,

involves helping individuals understand how that event changed their thoughts and feelings, leaving them at a loss to cope with life. A key part of the GRM is to help people discover those things that have been incomplete for them after their loss event and to help them make the necessary changes in their belief system so they can take personal responsibility to make changes in that system. Once this has been done, they can take action for completion and recovery.

The key to starting this process is outlined in the section on trauma and PTSD in the most recent edition of [“The Grief Recovery Handbook.”](#) It is essential that we move from clinical terms to the heart of the situation in dealing with the emotional pain that is grief! When someone tells you that they are suffering from PTSD and why, it involves acknowledging their statement and offering a set of words that address the emotional feelings that may have resulted from that event. Words such as “loss of trust”, “loss of safety”, and “loss of control” are among the suggestions offered. This may be the first time that this person has been offered feeling words that express how this event touched them on a personal level. If they respond affirmatively, you can then invite them to share other feelings that might have been generated. The focus of the GRM is in allowing people to safely share their feelings without analysis, criticism, or judgement, and then to offer them a mechanism to complete the relationship that caused these feelings to manifest.

I encourage you to read the section on trauma and PTSD in this latest edition of the handbook and to utilize this information in helping people who present with this diagnosis, whether it has been one they made themselves or one that was offered by a clinician. [John W. James](#), one of the authors and the founder of the Grief Recovery Institute, served in the Vietnam Conflict and dealt with the horrors of battlefield losses first hand. The tools he developed that are the backbone of the GRM were a major part of his personal recovery.

# Why society will use any word but grief. Grief Recovery can help in dealing with PTSD.



Jul 24, 2013

By Russell Friedman

In great measure, the words we use dictate the feelings we have. The more accurate and honest our language, the clearer our awareness of what affects us, and what we can do about it. Read on to find out how to overcome ptsd, trauma or stress using the tools of The Grief Recovery Method.

For example, over the past 35 years, we've fought what seems like a never-ending battle to distinguish the naturally occurring lowered state of emotional and physical energy caused by grief, which can be called depression, from the clinical depression diagnosed by psychiatrists when someone has a mental disorder. There's a world of difference between a lowered state of energy and a clinical depression.

At the same time, we've been fighting another endless battle to use correct language to define grief, as opposed to the seemingly infinite number of euphemisms that crop up every few years in our pop-psych culture, and serve only to push people further away from the truth.

*Here's a basic truth: "Grief is the normal and natural emotional reaction to loss or change of any kind."*

We'd all do well to just live from that truth. But just going back the last 150 years, there's been a constant attempt to avoid the word grief, and to use any number of inaccurate substitutes in its place. Most of the substituted words shift grief from the normal emotional reaction to loss, to either the intellect or the physical-medical realm, where the underlying grief gets lost or hidden.

## Phrases that mask the truthful underlying grief

Here's a short list of some of those words and phrases that mask the truthful underlying grief, along with brief explanations about how and when they were used:

**Melancholia** - A word with a long and checkered history of meaning and usage. In one of its incarnations it was used to describe grief during and after the Civil War. At that time, melancholia was defined as a mental disorder or mental illness.

**Shell Shock** - Used during and after WW I. While there is undoubtedly a physical aspect to being subjected to daily bombings, when any of your breaths could be your last, the grief caused by the losses of safety and other elements is rarely mentioned.

**Combat Fatigue** - Used during and after WW II. Being in a real war zone where survival requires moment-to-moment vigilance and consumes an inordinate amount of energy is unquestionably a cause of fatigue. But again, the grief of the loss of safety and well-being are removed from the discussion by the diagnostic language, combat fatigue.

**Burnout** – Popular in the 70s, this catchy phrase seemed to say something, but all it did was cover up the underlying grief issues that made people feel that way. By using an inaccurate label as a shield, people didn't have to talk about the grief and loss issues that were causing them to feel that way.

**Pressure and Stress** – This pair, although usually not used together, followed Burnout in the pop-psych vernacular. Some people define stress as something internal that we generate and feel within ourselves, while pressure is external and comes from outside of us. No matter how it's defined, we believe that what causes those feelings are grief or loss events of many different kinds, which again get overlooked by the jargon.

**PTSD** – While there are references throughout history to what is now called PTSD or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the phrase itself wasn't coined until 1980—long after the Vietnam War. As with the other words and phrases above, the cause of PTSD is grief, pure and simple. It is the losses of safety, of trust, of physical and emotional well-being that are lumped under an academic, diagnostic heading, but shift attention away from the grief.

**Trauma** – The latest. This simplistic, “one-word fits all” jargon is creating yet another wall between grieving people and their normal emotional reaction to the life events that affect them.

## Diagnostic Language Leads to Drug Therapies and Leaves the Broken Heart Unattended

The language we've highlighted here is often used by medical and mental health professionals to define and diagnose the people who come to them for help. They pass that language onto their clients-patients who adopt it as truth because it came from on high. They accept what they're told without further investigation. And as we said in our opening, “the words we use dictate the feelings we have.”

The tragedy of diagnostic language is that it leads primarily to psycho-pharmaceutical intervention, especially when grief is involved. Here's how: The professional substitutes the word depression in its clinical sense—rather than its normal reaction to loss sense—and attaches it to the grieving person. With that subtle shift, it then makes sense to prescribe anti-depressant drugs.

Once the grief is falsely pathologized and covered up with medications, the unsuspecting griever gets caught up in an endless cycle of meds covering up the pain. If and when the griever tries to get off the meds, the pain of the original unresolved grief comes back in full force. Scared by the resurgent grief, the griever goes back on the meds and the next cycle begins.

## It Doesn't Have to Be that Way!

For 35 years we've been helping grieving people discover and complete what was left emotionally incomplete for them by the death of someone meaningful in their life, or by a divorce or other losses. There's no need for fancy jargon, for diagnoses, and in most situations, pharmacological intervention.

## How to overcome PTSD: Back to basics

Calling grief what it is, grief.

Recognizing that grief is the normal and natural reaction to loss

Learning the series of actions that lead to recovery from or completion of loss.

Find a Certified Grief Recovery Specialist in your community and work 1-1 or enroll in their next group program!

Lastly, the latest revision of the Grief Recovery Handbook addresses this topic in further detail. To obtain your copy of this revised handbook, simply click on the link below to order your copy.



# Discounted Grief In Children



Sep 11, 2017

By Steve Moeller

The term Discounted Grief has been replaced in professional circles with **Disenfranchised Grief**. Basically, this refers to issues such as divorce, the break-up of a relationship and moving, to name but a few, that others may not recognize as grief producing experiences. In this article, we want to focus on those events that happen in the lives of our children that, as adults, we often totally discount as painful emotional losses. What most of us never think about is that when we have discounted grief in children, we are inadvertently sending them signals on how to deal with grief the rest of their lives.

## A little background

Children begin establishing their belief systems on how to deal with the issues of life at a very early age. **Basic psychology** tells us that 75% of the reasoning skills that our children will likely use for the rest of their lives are established by the age of two to three years old. In other words, before they have fully developed their verbal communication skills, they are already establishing a mindset on how to deal with events in their lives.

Most of this information is essential to their survival! They learn to look before crossing a street and to not touch a hot stove. Unfortunately, however, some of this information that they store may include elements of misinformation. This is often the case when it comes to how to deal with issues of loss.

Children rarely begin to develop an understanding of coping with the pain of emotional loss with the death of significant person in their lives. The losses that they face are ones that adults often see as totally insignificant. It might be the loss of a balloon in the park or a favorite toy. When this happens, they normally display their emotional pain with tears. This is when, as adults who do not wish to see our children suffer, that we offer them the first two bits of “misinformation” on how to cope with this emotional pain. We tell them:

Don't feel bad.

We will get you a new one!

On the face of it, both of these things sound like logical responses. As adults, neither of these losses sounds significant on any level. They are things that are easily replaced. What we do not realize or understand is the emotional connection our children may have to these objects. Once these things are replaced, our children may quickly adapt to the change. Unfortunately, they have also begun to establish an understanding that the display of sad emotions is not the correct response to loss, and that the best way to cope is with a replacement or replace the loss.

If this only happened once or twice in their formative years, children might not absorb this as the correct approach for dealing with emotionally painful events. Instead, they tend to hear this on a continuing basis. With each new loss of something that, as adults, we see as relatively meaningless, we repeat these same communications to our children. We do not do this to purposely implant misinformation in our children, but simply because we do not realize that is what is happening.

Another thing we fail to realize is that if we repeat the same behavior pattern 30 to 40 times, it becomes an established habit.

Why is this misinformation?

The best way to understand this is to look at how we deal with grief and loss as adults.

When we deal with a major life changing event, the best and most natural way to begin to process the feelings of grief is to express that emotional pain: to put voice to it. If we have continually been instructed to “not feel bad” when dealing with a loss, we instead tend to suppress those feelings. Trying to not feel bad rarely makes us feel better. We hold those feelings deep inside, where they continue to bother us, but do not feel comfortable sharing them with others. This does nothing to relieve and release that pain. As a result, we tend to relive those loss experiences each time we see something that reminds us of that relationship.

Most of us, after the death of a spouse, would never immediately consider “replacing” that person with someone else. **Studies** have shown, however, that men have few tools to deal with this emotional pain and frequently remarry or enter new relationships fairly quickly. When a long term relationship ends in divorce, this is also the case. Unconsciously, these people are simply following that established behavior pattern of replacement to deal with their emotional pain.

How do adults reinforce this and other misinformation on coping with loss and grief in our children?

One of the comments that I frequently heard, when I was very young and was crying about something that my parents deemed inconsequential, was, “If you are going to cry like that, I will give you something to cry about.” In truth, my parents never beat me, but that threat was enough to encourage me to “man up” and stuff my emotional pain. I have frequently been told by others that they heard this as well.

I remember very well when my first “girlfriend” and I broke up in grade school. I was miserable! Rather than encouraging me to put voice to those feelings, and take the necessary grief recovery actions to successfully move beyond that pain, I was told, “Don’t feel bad, there are a lot of fish in the sea!” I remember wondering at the time how this solved my problem, but I trusted that my parents knew what they were talking about. I stored that emotional pain inside and was much more reluctant to share my heart with the next girl I liked.

While I am sure that my parents knew childhood friendships come and go, they did not realize that they were establishing in me behavior patterns that I would continue to repeat over and over as I got older. As I moved into my twenties, I continued to share less and less of my heart with those girls to whom I was attracted, which ultimately doomed those relationships as well. I often tell people that it is only thanks to ultimately learning how to successfully grieve and “complete” lost relationships that I became a good candidate for a lasting and

loving marriage.

As part of this learning process, I also had to learn to let go of other bits of misinformation that I had stored in my belief system. I learned that “being strong” was yet another way I had learned to suppress my emotional pain. I learned that “keeping busy” to sidetrack me from any emotional loss I experienced was simply a way of seeking distractions, rather than facing and solving the problem.

There is a better approach than discounting early losses!

As adults, we need to remember that we once walked down many of the same paths that our children are taking today. We need to remember how we felt when those adults around us discounted our first grieving experiences. Instead of discounting them, we need to learn the necessary tools to allow our grieving children to express their feelings without analysis, criticism or judgment. It is about helping them to deal with painful events in the moment they occur, so that they can move through those events and not carry that pain into their future relationships.

“[When Children Grieve](#)” is a book that parents can use to help them in preparing their children to successfully move through emotionally painful events. It is not a book to give to children, but rather an educational guide for parents. It is not an intellectual instruction manual. It is written from the heart and from the perspective of one parent walking with another in this journey of offering children positive assistance in dealing with emotionally painful events. It gives assistance for helping adolescents, tweens and teenagers find a more effective way of dealing with any loss experience.

This is a book that parents can use on their own, or they can learn to utilize its techniques in a group situation. There are [Certified Grief Recovery Specialists](#) who have been trained to facilitate parent support groups in putting these methods into practice.

As parents, we have a choice. We can continue to instill in them the same information that has crippled us in dealing with loss events, or we can offer them tools that will be of value for the rest of their lives. We can continue to discount their early losses, or we can find better ways to help them, that will support them as they move to adulthood.

# Pet Loss: The Often Discounted Grief



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By Steve Moeller

The loss of a pet is very much a grieving experience. The emotional bonds formed with a pet often exceed the bonds formed with other people in a person's life. Many people never think of them as pets, but rather very special companions, best friends or a family member. A pet is the confidant with whom you can share everything without fear that they will repeat it to others. You never have to fear verbal analysis, criticism or judgment from your pet. Pets are there for you even when others walk away; the love experienced with a pet is often expressed as unconditional love and acceptance. When a pet dies, disappears or must be given away, the loss can be devastating.

I have seen this first hand more times than I can count. The only time I can remember seeing my father cry was after the death of his favorite cat. Like many pet owners, my parents explored medical treatments for their cat that were well beyond the actions they might have even taken for themselves.

A major problem pet owners face is how pet loss is an often discounted grief by

society. It is frequently the case that friends and family members do not realize the depth of this emotional loss and fall back on the “myths” they learned in dealing with grief when trying to help. They will give the griever suggestions about why they shouldn't feel bad, which never really help them feel better. If anything, these suggestions encourage the griever to suppress and bury his or her emotional pain. The most common advice that is offered to pet owners is to replace the loss with a new pet. It is rare that a friend would ever tell someone who had lost a human family member is that the best way to deal with the situation is to “go out and get a new one,” yet they will suggest this to a grieving pet owner without a second thought. These friends and family members forget that a beloved pet is a “real” family member!

As grief and loss professionals, we have a very real opportunity to make a difference. Since we understand that grief is the normal and natural human reaction to any change or end that occurs in life, we also know that the loss of a pet can be an enormously emotional loss experience. We also recognize that most grievers have never learned anything of value in dealing with any type of loss they may have experienced. This is not only an opportunity to help this griever with the pain associated with their pet loss, it's also an opportunity to introduce to them to valuable tools available that can help them deal with the other emotional losses in their life as well.

We begin this process of assistance in the same way we would with any other loss situation. Once the griever shares with us that they lost a beloved pet, we ask, “What happened?” and simply listen. We don't offer the clichéd responses they have heard from others. We don't analyze, criticize or judge what we hear. We listen to them as they tell their story and let them see that we are emotionally touched by what they have to say. You will most likely be the first person that has responded to them in this way. You will probably be the first person who didn't discount their loss or turn this into an opportunity to make this all about their own personal pet loss story. In approaching this way, by creating a safe place to express their feelings, you have already identified yourself as different from anyone else. This will likely mean that they will be more receptive to listening to what you might have to say to help them.

As with any griever, people who have lost a pet are desperate for meaningful assistance. Like every other griever, they have found themselves disappointed that those they counted on to help them offered little or no emotional help. The fact that you listened, rather than trying to “fix” the problem, has given you instant credibility. Now is the time that we introduce the concept of taking action in the



form of the “[Grief Recovery Handbook For Pet Loss.](#)”

What makes this book different from “[The Grief Recovery Handbook](#)” is that it is fully focused on pet loss. It assures them, at the outset, that grieving the loss of this special companion is very normal and natural; there is nothing about losing a pet to feel ashamed of. The assignments focus strictly on the loss of pets, rather than reminding them of the other losses they have experienced. It's all about “completing their relationship” with their special friend, so that they can enjoy their fond memories of the lifetime they shared, rather than reliving those moments related to the loss alone. It allows them to take emotional action on this loss, which will put them in a far better situation with any future pet they may choose to later adopt. It gives them a chance to form a new and independent relationship with a new pet, rather than leaving them in the situation of “replacing” their loss.

Once they have successfully taken these actions, it will also open their eyes to the possibility of taking meaningful actions on other losses they may have experienced in their lifetime. The vast majority of people don't realize that there is any action plan available for dealing with emotional loss. Chances are they have a history of stuffing and discounting their feelings concerning the majority of losses they have experienced. Basically, they have given up hope for a better solution because it was never offered or envisioned by them. The fact that they have found success with this loss will help them see that elements of this same program might offer them a chance to take other Grief Recovery actions as well.

We have often said that grieverers are among the most abused members of our society. Those closest around them, often without even realizing they are doing so, tend to offer useless suggestions how they can “get over it” or “replace the loss”. As Grief Recovery professionals, you know that people never “get over” a loss, but they can learn the tools to recover from a loss, thereby transforming the quality of their life when taught the proper actions and tools. To be the person who can guide someone from grieving to recovery from their loss, with the correct information and actions, offer the hope for a better tomorrow and is a very special gift!

# More information about The Grief Recovery Method®

We offer local support groups, 1-on-1 support, 2 Day Personal Workshops, and Certification Training to become a leader on Grief Recovery in your own community. We also offer several books available to help you, or others, recover from grief and loss.

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